

2023 LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY Campaign for Justice

"TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH."

— HELEN KELLER



Together We Can Do So Much

The civil legal issues encountered by those living in poverty are critical and often life-altering—civil legal assistance may keep a family safely housed; secure an essential government benefit to keep a household afloat; access life-saving healthcare; protect a survivor from further abuse; remove a barrier to employment by expunging a record; and so much more.

Oftentimes, these legal issues are inextricably linked, urgent, compounding, and cascading. The loss of a home—perhaps precipitated by a costly medical emergency or the loss of a benefit essential to a rent-burdened budget—may quickly threaten employment, parental rights, economic security, educational outcomes, and mental and physical health. These harms extend beyond a single household onto larger communities in ways both quantifiable and immeasurable—through the fragmentation of community ties and safety networks; tenant turnover; lost economic productivity as a result of disruptions to education or employment; and increased costs associated with sheltering a family, additional social services, treatment of preventable health issues, or the funding of foster care placements.

According to the most recent Justice Gap study conducted by the Legal Services Corporation, **low-income Americans did not receive any or enough legal help for 92% of their civil legal problems**, citing the cost of legal assistance as the primary barrier to seeking and receiving help. In a high-cost-of-living state where **more than 3.1 million New Jerseyans—or 34% of our state's population—live in True Poverty**, this cost barrier is particularly acute.

While this reality is devastating, it is not unchangeable. Our client stories—featured both online and in this brochure—make clear that the efforts of Legal Services staff and our network of pro bono volunteers do change lives. At the 2023 Equal Justice Awards Reception, hundreds of volunteer attorneys from across the state, along with various community members and organizations, were honored for their commitment to our clients and mission. This annual event, which you can learn more about on our website, serves as a powerful reminder that the quest for equal justice requires advocacy and effort from all of us.

As we continue to navigate a post-pandemic recovery that disproportionately impacts low-income and vulnerable New Jerseyans, **we need support from each and every one of our supporters** and humbly ask for yours: through your financial contribution to this annual campaign; through your time and expertise as a pro bono volunteer; or through your continued support of our efforts, advocacy, and events, such as the Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series—public webinars intended to raise awareness of important social, economic, and racial justice issues.

From all of us here at New Jersey Legal Services, thank you very much for your past and continued support. When we work together to secure justice for those who need it, we have a lasting impact on the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

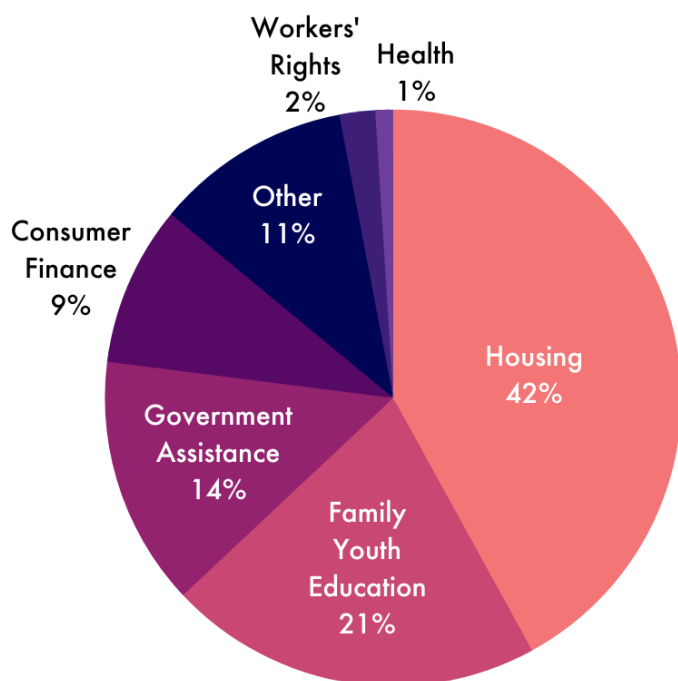
Dawn K. Miller, Esq.

President, Legal Services of New Jersey

November 2023



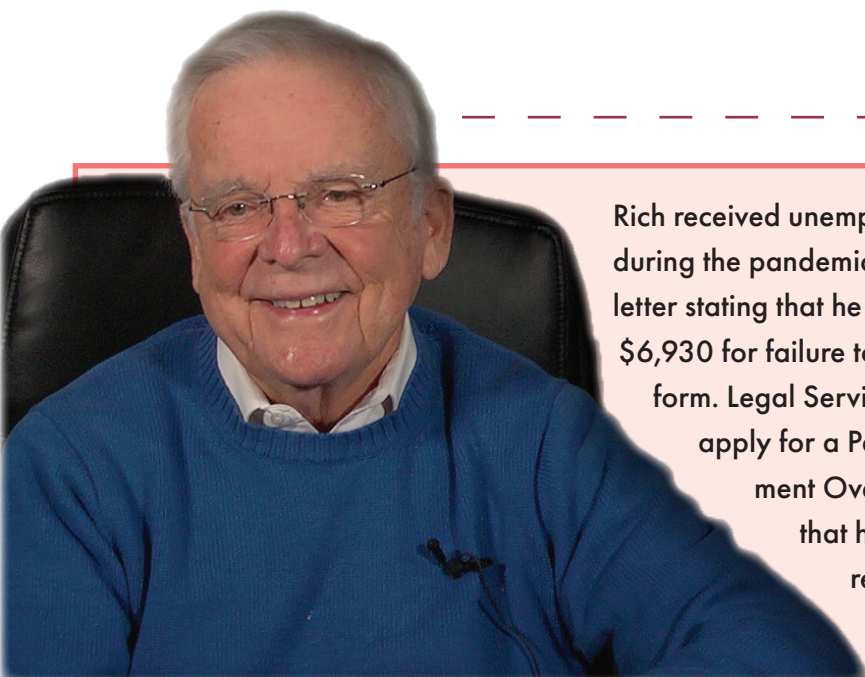
Legal Services by Type



Program Highlights

Legal Services continues to meet the post-pandemic challenges head on, while striving to expand our reach. Below are just a few examples of recent outreach to both clients and attorneys across the state.

- In 2022, the statewide Legal Services system opened nearly 60,000 cases, assisting approximately 180,000 New Jerseyans.
- Between February 2022 and August 2023, four major firms and corporations and approximately 450 individuals together provided at least 12,705 hours of free legal assistance with New Jersey Legal Services programs across the state. Based on the average hourly rate for attorneys in New Jersey, we estimate that the contributions of these pro bono attorneys total more than \$4 million in free legal aid to Legal Services programs and clients.
- The bilingual legal education website, LSNJLAWSM, continues to garner more than 54,000 views each month, providing timely information about the most critical legal areas—including post-COVID Medicaid renewals, unemployment benefits, food stamps, rental assistance, voting, education, and a new section on the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals. The most popular articles of 2023 were: *NJ FamilyCare 2023 Income Eligibility Levels*, with 23,547 views, and *SNAP—Am I Eligible?*, with 23,310 views. The most downloaded publications were *Tenants' Rights in New Jersey* (58,272 downloads) and *Divorce in New Jersey: A Self-Help Guide* (44,862 downloads).



Rich received unemployment benefits during the pandemic but later received a letter stating that he would have to repay \$6,930 for failure to complete an online form. Legal Services helped him apply for a Pandemic Unemployment Overpayment waiver so that he would not have to return the money he had received.

"She never quit and she never gave up. She is an outstanding lawyer."

Watch Rich's video on www.lsnj.org/cfi

Meeting Clients Where They Are

In partnership with RWJBarnabas Health and others, LSNJ's innovative Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) project provides onsite legal advice and representation at a number of hospitals throughout New Jersey to help resolve social economic impediments to health, such as Social Security disability and Medicaid, housing and habitability, special education, and guardianship. Staff also

provide substantive and ongoing training to medical providers (residents, social workers, patient navigators, nurses, and other staff) on the legal issues that negatively impact their patients' health and wellbeing. Opportunities for pro bono volunteers exist as well. Says Kenneth A. Rosen, Esq., of Lowenstein

Sandler LLP, "I have been appointed several times to represent disabled young people in connection with people seeking to be appointed as a guardian for my client. Some of the young people have been on the autism spectrum. One was in tragic car accident. ... In all of the matters that I have handled, I have walked out saying to myself that I am very lucky."



Invest in Justice

Donate to the 2023 campaign.

"Being part of Saint Joseph's [University Medical Center] took me to Legal Services; [it] was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Watch Marisol's video on www.lsnj.org/cfi

Marisol's daughter Natalie has autism, which presented a unique challenge when Natalie neared 18 years of age. In addition to getting SSI assistance for Natalie, LAMP helped Marisol secure guardianship of her child so she can continue to have a say in Natalie's medical treatments.



Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series Draws More Than 1,750 Participants

Through its Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series, named in honor of LSNJ’s co-founder and former president and intended to raise awareness of important social, economic, and racial justice issues, LSNJ hosted two free public webinars: Environmental Justice in New Jersey (December 9, 2022) and Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) in New Jersey—Representation, Discrimination, and Other Critical Issues Facing the Community (May 31, 2023). The webinars feature guest lecturers and members of the community who speak on topics of appeal to both lawyers and non-lawyers. Continuing credits are offered for lawyers. Combined, there were over 1,750 webinar participants. Learn about upcoming webinars at LSNJ.pub/JusticeSeries.

Environmental Justice in New Jersey (December 9, 2022)

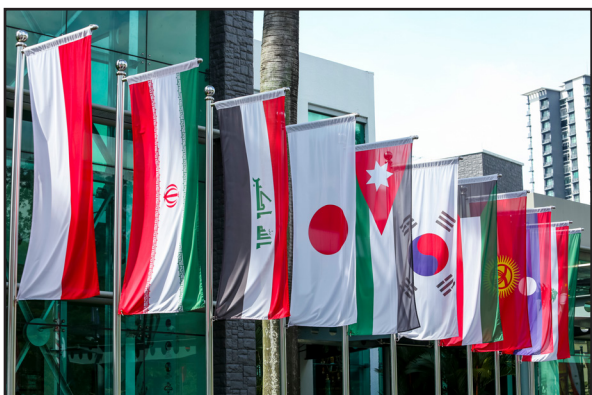
Moderated by **Akil Roper, Esq.**, Senior Vice President and Co-Supervisor of LSNJ’s Racial and Ethnic Justice Initiative, panelists **Verlina Reynolds-Jackson**, Assemblywoman and 2023 Lipman-Franks Award recipient; **Olga D. Pomar, Esq.**, Housing Preservation and Community Development Coordinator, South Jersey Legal Services; **Melissa Miles**, Executive Director, New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance; and **Dr.**

Nicky Sheats, Director, Center for the Urban Environment at the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University discussed the concept of environmental justice and the impact of environmental hazards on “overburdened communities,” as well as the fight for fairer environmental laws and protections from unsafe conditions in New Jersey. View the webinar at LSNJ.pub/EnvJust-NJ.



Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) in New Jersey—Representation, Discrimination, and Other Critical Issues Facing the Community (May 31, 2023)

The AAPI webinar was sponsored by Verizon, Inc., and moderated by LSNJ board member **Jhanice V. Domingo, Esq.**, partner at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden P.C. Panelists **Rose Cuison-Villazor**, Interim Dean and Professor of Law at Rutgers Law School; **Fannie Chan Jarvis**, Community Relations Specialist and AAPI Liaison at the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights; **Dr. Ying Lu**, Associate Professor at NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development and co-founder of E Pluribus Unum Project; and **Maria Vallejo, Esq.**, partner at Chasan, Lamparello, Mallon and Cappuzzo, shared their wealth of knowledge and provided their important and unique perspectives. View the webinar at LSNJ.pub/AAPI-NJ.



Addressing New Jersey's Housing Crisis

Stubbornly High Rents, Inflated Real Estate Market, and Limited Access to Counsel

The lack of affordable rental units, an inflated real estate market, and limited access to counsel have exacerbated the challenges of securing safe and affordable housing in New Jersey, disproportionately impacting low-income and minority residents.

As recently as 2015, The U.S. Department of Justice and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau filed a complaint against NJ-based Hudson City Savings Bank for racially discriminatory redlining practices in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. The bank illegally withheld access to mortgages for residents in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods and only advertised discounted home improvement loans to residents of whiter communities.

Renters face specific barriers that are at times insurmountable.

- Fifty-two percent (52%) of New Jersey renters spent more than 30% of their income on rent in 2022.
- Twenty-seven percent (27%) of New Jersey renters spent more than 50% of their income on rent in 2022.
- Nearly ninety-six percent (95.9%) of tenants threatened with eviction went to court alone without access to legal advice or representation in 2022.



"It was just like if I had paid \$1,000,000 for a five star attorney."

Watch Sharon's video on www.lsnj.org/cfj

Sharon had undergone two major surgeries, and her salary had been decreased when her mortgage company sued her for foreclosure. They claimed they had first mailed her a document to modify the mortgage, but she never received it. Legal Services helped mediate the case so that she was given a three-month trial modification and finally a permanent modification. She was able to keep her long-time home.

How is Legal Services responding?

Legal Services provides direct assistance to impacted individuals and has significantly increased its legal education efforts, both through regular “Renters’ Rights” articles in our community newsletter and through in-person and remote legal rights presentations. Below are some highlights.

- New and updated website articles on topics, such as ANCHOR property tax relief; confidentiality of eviction matters; Hurricane Ida assistance; rental assistance programs; and rights of homeless students were viewed more than 475 times per month on average.
- The most popular LSNJLAWSM article was “Rental Assistance Programs: Where to Look and What to Do if a Landlord Does Not Comply,” viewed an average of 1,165 each month over the past year.
- A new “Renters’ Rights” feature was included in each issue of our community newsletter, Looking Out For Your Legal Rights over the past year, with a reach of 1,450 print distribution, through regional Legal Services offices and partner agencies, and 3,161 digital downloads to date.
- Since its inception in September 2022, the Housing and Eviction prevention and Legal assistance Project (HELP) has participated in 200 outreach presentations, resource fairs, and trainings—reaching thousands of community members and professionals.
- The Foreclosure Defense Project assisted more than 500 household members in mortgage or property tax foreclosure matters in 2023.



Johny’s landlord claimed to have raised the rent but failed to notify Johny for an entire year. When the landlord finally told him, he said that Johny owed him nearly \$6,000 dollars. Legal Services helped mediate a settlement, using the COVID-19 moratorium to show that landlord had illegally increased rent. Johny did not have to pay and did not have to leave his apartment.

“I don’t know where I would have been right now without Legal Services. ... I would have probably been kicked out of the apartment.”

Watch Johny’s video on www.lsnj.org/cfj



LSNJ Board of Trustees

Cynthia M. Jacob, Esq.
Fisher & Phillips LLP
Chair

Karol Corbin Walker, Esq.
Kaufman Dolowich Voluck
First Vice Chair

Virginia A. Long, Esq.
Fox Rothschild LLP
Second Vice Chair

John P. Kahn, Esq.
CVS Health/Aetna
Secretary

Carlos M. Bollar, Esq.
Archer & Greiner

Jhanice Domingo, Esq.
Pashman Stein Walder Hayden P.C.

Douglas S. Eakeley, Esq.
Rutgers Law School

Michael K. Furey, Esq.
Day Pitney

Jaynee LaVecchia, Esq.
McCarter & English, LLP

Ross A. Lewin, Esq.
Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP

Regina C. Little, Esq.
National Treasury Employees Union

Edwin J. McCreedy, Esq.
Shrewsbury, NJ

Stephen M. Orlofsky, Esq.
Blank Rome LLP

Marjorie Perry
President and CEO
M2M Construction & Management

Lisa Rodriguez, Esq.
Dilworth Paxson LLC

Ramona E. Romero, Esq.
Princeton University

Angelica Valenza
Global Services, Strategy Lead
Johnson & Johnson

John E. Wallace, Jr., Esq.
Brown & Connery, LLP

James R. Zazzali, Esq.
Zazzali, Fagella, Nowak, Kleinbaum & Friedman

Past Board Chairs

Deborah T. Poritz, 2011-2017
James H. Coleman, Jr., 2006-2010
Michael R. Cole, 1996-2005
William D. Hardin, 1989-1996
Douglas S. Eakeley, 1981-1989

We Need Your Support!

The annual Campaign for Justice raises funds for New Jersey's civil Legal Services system, which provides direct services to clients in all 21 counties. Your tax-deductible contribution will help us change lives, accept more cases, and provide the legal expertise and the access to justice our clients need. Please donate by visiting the Campaign for Justice website at **www.LSNJ.org/CFJ**. For more information, email **development@LSNJ.org**. Thank you!



Since 1966

Statewide Program
Legal Services of New Jersey



Regional Programs
Central Jersey Legal Services
Essex-Newark Legal Services
Legal Services of Northwest Jersey
Northeast New Jersey Legal Services
South Jersey Legal Services



www.LSNJ.org
www.LSNJLAW.org
www.PROBONONJ.org
www.NJEJLA.org

